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Wandering Fires
Poems

Mary and Violet McDougal

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WANDERING FIRES

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Wandering Fires

POEMS

by

Mary and Violet McDougal



THE STRATFORD COMPANY

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LOVINGLY INSCRIBED

TO

OUR FATHER AND MOTHER

D. A. AND MYRTLE McDOUGAL

Foreword

The publishers beg to thank the editors of the following publications for their kind permission to re-publish in this volume a number of the poems that originally appeared in their papers:

NEW YORK HERALD-TRIBUNE, LYRIC WEST, PICTORIAL REVIEW, CONTEMPORARY VERSE, UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA MAGAZINE, LADIES' HOME JOURNAL, DELINEATOR, DOUBLE DEALER, NEW YORK TIMES, DAILY OKLAHOMAN, MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE, KANSAS CITY STAR, MIAMI HERALD.

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POEMS
BY
VIOLET McDOUGAL
Poet Laureate of Oklahoma

.

Wandering Fires

MOONLIGHT LAND

VIOLET McDOUGAL

There is a silver silent land
Where white moonflowers grow;
Where long-leaved silver shadows lie
Across still waters; and the flow
Of shadow rivers, endlessly
Goes on and on; and all the sky
Is pale with light;
And in the stream
Reflections of the drifting stars
Go sliding past,
And they who dream
Asleep or waking enter here
Through arches of cold carven stone
And gates with pallid marble bars:
They drift together or alone
Through pale-lit pathways.
And the vast
And never ending silence near
Is like a strange compelling hand.
And there are gardens, moonlit, still,

Wandering Fires

Of terraced silence, with white hounds
To guard in ghostly stillness till
Their soundless hunting bugle sounds.
And underneath the quiet wind
The long grass silvers,
And behind,
And straight across, and all before
The shallow moonlight lies.
And they who drift
In pale canoes, down soundless streams
With hands that mar reflected skies
Watch how the slow sands shift and shift
With wonder in their eyes.
And through their never-ending dreams
A shadowed glory strays
And slides along the idle sand
Through drifting, endless days
With dwellers in the moonlight land.

THE WAR DRUM

VIOLET McDOUGAL

I.

I have come down to watch them dance
With cool disdainful eyes.
It happens that by some strange chance
I have a strain of this same blood —
The great War Drum's unmeaning thud
Their savage, shrill barbaric cries
Amuse me oddly. Who could know
My own ancestors, long ago
Danced clay-daubed, shrieking, to and fro
For in my heart I mock them — so —
“Hai-ai!”

II.

The great War Drum goes thud, thud, thud,
The painted warriors shriek for blood,
The rattles shrill, the conches scream
Like devil blasts in some wild dream,

Wandering Fires

And through the clamor and the tumult comes
The blind uneasy throbbing of the drums,
A hollow, dull, reverberating sound
That echoes, muffled, from the very ground.

III.

These people must not guess nor know
My ancestry. My mocking air,
My wild derision — I must show
There never could be kinship there —
I wave my arms above the crowd
I mock these savages aloud —
“Hai-ai!”

IV.

Yet through my temples, pulsing, aching,
The blood beats thickly, throbbing, shaking
In blind vibration to the beat
Of sullen drums and stamping feet.
The wild flames throw fantastic rings of light
On paint smeared bodies. Thickly through the night
The maddening monotony of sound
Comes closing dully in from all around.

Wandering Fires

V.

The tumult shakes against my heart
Fierce and insistent, dull with pain
Prolonged and aching, through it all
The War Drum booms its sullen call
In fierce vibration through my brain —
A muffled pounding, thick, insane —
These are *my* people! Let me go!
You cannot understand nor know
That long-dead warriors call again —
Stand back! I join my tribesmen — so —
“Hai-ai!”

VI.

The great War Drum goes thud! thud! thud!
The Warpath shall run red with blood!
Back, though a thousand years have passed,
I come to join my tribe at last!
Shrilling exultant, till the savage sky
Rings with the echoes of our long war cry
I join the uproar, plunging to and fro!
The ghostly feathered braves of long ago
Wake shrieking, while the War Drum's maddening
thud
Thunders above the tumult—Blood! Blood! Blood!

THE WAYS OF PEACE

VIOLET MCDOUGAL

We shall go down the windless ways of peace
With quiet hearts and grave, untroubled eyes,
All laughter shall go from us, and all sighs,
All sadness, and all merriment shall cease.

The things that seemed important once shall pass
Unnoticed, all the struggle and the strain,
Like dim reflections in a distant glass,
The weariness, the laughter, and the pain —

And we shall wonder at the idle things
We spent our lives upon, and we shall know
The strange still peace the end of all things brings,
And wait in silence for the call to go.

And we shall know no sadness of regret
No yearning back of unfulfilled desires,
No futile struggle, weariness nor fret,
Only the solemn hush of sinking fires.

Wandering Fires

We shall go down the still, unshadowed ways
With grave quiescence; strife and toil shall cease,
Beyond the reach of earthly blame or praise,
Untroubled, we shall tread the ways of peace.

Wandering Fires

JAZZ

VIOLET McDOUGAL

Lights and music. See the dancers glide,
Hear the brasses crash, hear the trombones slide,
Hear the violins with their hungry wail
Like starved hyenas on a jungle trail.
Hear the mindless laugh, hear the chuckling moan,
Hear the strangled sob of the Saxaphone,
Hear the cello snore as it sleeps alone.

Chalk white faces and lips smeared red
Daubed and painted the dancers sway,
Jungle ancestors long since dead,
Painted savages streaked with clay
Howled and circled with rhythmic tread
Danced in the jungles the self same way.

Long jet earrings and eyes agleam
Slim and satin the dancers glide,
Hammered nose rings and earrings seem
Always the objects of jungle pride.
Hear the rattles shrill, hear the conches scream —
Or is it the Trombones that shriek and slide?

Wandering Fires

Is it jungle devils that mock and moan
While the tom-toms beat and the war drums throb
Or is it only the Saxophone
That laughs in the midst of a breaking sob?
Is it jackals that wail at a jungle shrine
In heathen grief for their jungle sins? —
Or is it only the famished whine
And the nasal rasp of the violins?

The music screeches, the dancers seem
Wrapped in the coils of a jungle dream
In sleepy silence they sway and glide,
The lights grow pallid beneath their gaze,
They see strange visions of jungle days,
The careless doors of the night swing wide
And the jungle clamors and croons outside.

CHILDREN OF THE SUN

VIOLET McDOUGAL

There is among ancient peoples a legend of a time of great drouth, when two youths, the bravest and strongest of the tribe, went flower-garlanded to a flaming death to appease the anger of the great Sun God.

They wandered hand in hand, with streaming hair
And copper bodies gleaming in the sun;
With fierce eyes burning through the tropic glare
As heat waves beating up the flaming air,
Seeing the end of what had just begun.
The fiery children of the sun they strayed,
With scarlet blossoms in their wind-blown hair
And hot eyes gazing with an eager stare,
They watched the heat-born lightning's sudden flare.
A tawny jungle beast with eyes of jade,
A lazy, yawning leopard purred beside,
Licking with hot wet tongue their clasping hands;
Caressing them with gleaming eyes that lied.
Passion and smouldering treachery for their guide,
They strayed across the shining, twisting sands.
With hot desire they found the blazing sun
At the earth's end. It glowed white-hot and red,
And drew them with a force that seemed to stun.

Wandering Fires

Their eyes both sought, and seeking, seemed to shun;
Their hands were clasped. With passion and with
dread
They gazed, and leaped into the flaming sun.

Wandering Fires

WHITE WOLVES

VIOLET McDOUGAL

There is a legend in the North that the souls of men and women who have been frozen to death roam the snow fields attended by white wolves.

This is a white and empty land;
No sound against the iron band
Of steel-chill stars that rim the world;
No sound where furious waters hurled
Against the tall cliff's gleaming face
Fall frothing at its iron base.
The silence feels an eerie croon,
I hear them sweeping up the trail —
The riders of the silent gale,
And white wolves singing to the moon!

The stars are freezing to the sky
Without a sound; so still they lie,
And cold, above the strange ice-glare,
So still, above the wild lights' flare
That signals dawning; and the swift
White leaping waters surge and lift.
They break the silence with their rune,

Wandering Fires

Far swinging on an unknown trail,
With laughter rising to a wail —
And white wolves singing to the moon!

THE KNIFE-THROWER

VIOLET McDOUGAL

The crowd is here, night after night,
Beyond the hard white glare of light,
Expectant faces, row on row,
To watch me while I poise and throw
The gleaming knives that cut the air
And, hissing, strike the rough boards, where
She stands with outstretched arms. The crowd
Sits rustling, murmuring aloud;
They watch the wicked knives that hiss
Like hooded cobras — If I miss! —
The long knives leap out, serpentwise,
Thin evil darts. Her laughing eyes
Are unafraid. I hem her in
With whizzing blades. A sudden din
Of swift applause goes sweeping by!
And every night I wonder why
My hand held steady. Will it be
The next night, with them watching me —
The next night, that my sure hand slips
And laughter leaves her painted lips?

Wandering Fires

The knife that, like a thrown thin flame,
Licks out and sears, will end the game?
The lean knives pin her to the boards,
And satisfy the eager hordes
That watch their vicious whizzing flight?
I wonder — will it be — to-night?

Wandering Fires

HEREDITY

VIOLET McDOUGAL

Our apish forebears clung to trees,
In times far antedating these —
In sleep would cling with hands and toes.
They wore no high heeled pumps nor hose —
So Darwin says — I guess he knows.

If they had lost their hold, you see,
And toppled down from out their tree,
Wild animals were all around
To grab them when they hit the ground,
With teeth all primed and set to gnash,
Through cutlet, steak or fresh ape hash —
Careers were ended with a crash!

But those who wakened with a start
Did not become Ape à la carte,
They locked their toes in tighter hold —
The fit survivors, we are told,
Lived to become both gray and old.

Wandering Fires

We dream of falling, while in bed;
We waken with a start instead.
The instinct that our forebears knew
Is handed down to me and you.
We might have missed the whole Big Show
If Grandpa Ape, so long ago,
Had not waked just in time, you know.

KENTUCKY IN FICTION

VIOLET McDUGAL

In the hills of Kentucky, or so I've been told,
The natives are awfully wild —
They are rude and uncouth, but their hearts are of
gold
And they never wear shirts that are biled.

The women are mostly named Lizbuth or June,
Their hearts are incredibly pure,
They love to steal out 'neath a low-hanging moon
And snipe at a stray revenoor.

They're startingly beautiful, coy as gazelles —
They run like possessed from a stranger;
But they eat from his hand with shy maidenly yells,
When convinced that thar h'aint any danger.

The men are all named either David or Judd,
They stand six feet two in their sox —
Except they don't wear 'em. They're thirsty for
blood
And they shoot from the shelter of rocks.

Wandering Fires

Their spare time is passed in the pleasantest way,
When they rest from their arduous labors.
Each cleans up his rifle or gun, so they say,
And goes out to pot at the neighbors.

They live on corn licker and feuds, I am told,
And terbacker is chawed all the time.
No one in Kentucky can ever grow old —
He's killed ere he passes his prime.

Wandering Fires

PHANTOM WATCHERS

VIOLET McDOUGAL

We who have never been,
We who will never be,
Gather to mock at men
Here by the twilit sea,
Gather to jeer at men
Down by the phantom sea.

We who were never born,
Here by the chanting sea
Gather with ghostly scorn,
Mocking the things that be,
Jeering with elfin scorn
Men, and the things that be.

They carefully fashion fetters
And fetter their own strong hands,
Then they cry aloud for their freedom
And never one understands

Wandering Fires

That they welded their own strong shackles,
That they but build to destroy,
They weave gray webs of sorrow
And grief where there should be joy.

They set up above them tyrants,
And fashion unequal laws,
Then whine at their own oppression —
That effect should follow cause.

They carefully build for ages
Great cities, and rear strong sons;
Then they shatter the work of a lifetime
In a flash of great-mouthed guns.

They incite each other to riot,
Revolt and ruin, because
They must throw off the law's oppression —
They who have made the laws.

We gather to watch and mock them
With laughter and phantom jeers;
The sound of our eerie laughter
Goes echoing down the years.

Wandering Fires

Poor little struggling, blind things,
Aimless and lost, forlorn,
Let us not mock them, Brothers, —
We who were never born —

Let us but watch in silence, —
They are more real than we,
We who are only phantoms,
Here by a phantom sea.

Let us not mock them, Brothers,
Pitiful, struggling men,
Tragic and blind and futile,
Such as we might have been —

We who have never been,
We who will never be,
Gather to pity men
Here by the twilit sea,
Gather to sigh for men
Here by the sighing sea.

Wandering Fires

THE DERVISHES

VIOLET MCDUGAL

Beneath the mad white riot of the lights
With lips bright-swept with laughter, fever-dry,
With restless eyes aflame, through burning nights
The dancers whirl; the music throbbing by
In leaping madness flames along their blood,
A rush of savage laughter, fierce with pain;
And wild excitement in a blazing flood
Sweeps them to flashing ecstasy again.

The eager reckless music laughing past
In pulsing beats, on hot vibrating wings
Shakes at their hearts. Exultant savage things,
They reel like frenzied dervishes at last —
The hot red dawn that flowers overhead
Finds them in mad exhaustion, flame-shot eyes
Ablaze with sleeplessness; wild, laughing cries
And eager feet that drag like weary lead.

Wandering Fires

THE CITY OF ILLUSION

(SAN FRANCISCO)

VIOLET McDOUGAL

Carved from the mist of an opium dream
Of amber and amethyst haze,
The City of Chinamen lies by the sea
Wrapped in its ancient idolatry,
With its narrow streets and its crooked ways;
With its yellow fog where the street lights gleam
On yellow faces, a restless stream;
With its dragon alleys that writhe and twist
Till the fog and the yellow faces seem
A tangled dream in a drug-drenched mist.

A crystal-gazer asleep by the sea
And lulled by the rocking tide —
In a drugged half-trance of monotony
Asleep and adream by the rocking sea
The city lies glittering restlessly
Asleep by the waterside.

Wandering Fires

Set like a bubble of vanishing light
In onyx and amber and jade,
The City of Sorcerers lies by the Sea
Swathed in inscrutable mystery,
With its narrow streets where the earthquake played
And the great fire swept in its lurid flight
In a past, long distant, forgotten quite,
With its phantom fog and its murky bay; —
A city asleep in enchanted night
Where a thousand years are a dreaming day.

THE ICE CITY (WASHINGTON)

VIOLET McDUGAL

This is a crystal city sheathed in ice,
The dark streets poured across with molten glass,
The people slipping, clutching, as they go
To where the white-lit theaters entice,
And restaurants agleam, in row on row,
To lure the seething crowds that laugh and pass.

Within the park, a cold carved warrior stands
In lonely scorn beneath a film of sleet,
The crowds go surging past along the street,
With shoving shoulders, quick impatient hands.

The still bronze figures crouch against the cold
In silence, while the heavy sleet glaze forms
Across their bare bronze shoulders, and their arms;
And gleams along the unsheathed blades they hold.

The bronze lit eagle, screaming, poised for flight
With fierce curved beak, and ready rending claws,

Wandering Fires

Is heavy-winged with dazzling silver sleet;
The trees are made of splintered glass; the night
Is clear and brittle; all along the street
The endless crowds surge past without a pause.

Wandering Fires

THE CITY OF ENCHANTMENT

(NEW YORK)

VIOLET MCDUGAL

In the city of enchantment
All the world goes surging by,
Brilliant streams of changeful color ebb and flow;
There is crash and din and clangor
For the tides of life beat high
In the ceaseless shifting crowds that come and go.

There are dragon traffic towers,
And their restless flashing eyes
In uncanny demon wisdom change and glow;
While the giant elevated
Crouching grimly, hides the skies
From the noisy seething crowds that surge below.

And along the sword-bright Hudson
Silver-sheathed in vagrant mist
Are the ghostly ferries gliding to and fro;
And the city's lights are softened
Through a haze of amethyst
While the winds of still enchantment seem to blow.

THE PEACOCK SCREEN

VIOLET McDOUGAL

The lights are red; the lights are green
Behind the jeweled peacock screen
That shades the half-lit cabaret —
The painted peacocks strut and preen
In changeful phosphorescent sheen.
Outside, I watch the dancers sway
To strange unearthly music, gay
Yet subtly weird. The shadows stray
Through peacock mazes, sway and lean,
The wailing minors have their way;
The shadows shift and glide and stay
And weave fantastic steps between.
The lights show lurid blue and green,
The violins wail on unseen,
Inside the tired musicians play, —
The shadows sway and cling and lean
Behind the gilded peacock screen
Within the weird-lit cabaret.

THE SEA WOLF

VIOLET McDOUGAL

The fishermen say, when your catch is done
And you're sculling in with the tide,
You must take great care that the Sea Wolf's share
Is tossed to him overside.

They say that the Sea Wolf rides, by day,
Unseen on the crested waves,
And the sea mists rise from his cold green eyes
When he comes from his salt sea caves.

The fishermen say, when it storms at night
And the great seas bellow and roar,
That the Sea Wolf rides on the plunging tides,
And you hear his howl at the door.

And you must throw open your door at once,
And fling your catch to the waves,
Till he drags his share to his cold sea lair,
Straight down to his salt sea caves.

Wandering Fires

Then the storm will pass, and the still stars shine
In peace — so the fishermen say —
But the Sea Wolf waits by the cold Sea Gates
For the dawn of another day.

Wandering Fires

CHINATOWN

VIOLET McDOUGAL

The lights were changing red and green,
 With dragon emblems everywhere,
The lights were writhing serpentine
And spreading silver, and the street
 Was blue with incense in the air,
And stealthy with small padding feet.

The windows full of strange cut jade,
 And elephants of carved black teak,
Weird smiling Buddhas, subtly made,
And burnished dragons, many scaled.
 I heard a slant-eyed woman speak,
A singsong chant, as though she wailed.

We saw tall smoothly lacquered jars,
 And gilded chains, and Chinese gongs,
And doors with heavy metal bars,
And Chinese zither-players there,
 With strangely wailing Chinese songs
And incense heavy in the air.

Wandering Fires

Strange Oriental faces came
To stare at us and disappear
In darkened doorways, with the same
Cold slanting eyes, impassive gaze,
And catlike footfalls everywhere,
Through crooked streets, a tangled maze.

Wandering Fires

PIRATE SONG

VIOLET McDOUGAL

They say that the days are past and gone
Of Kidd and his pirate crew —
Of fabulous gain on the Spanish Main
Where the Skull-and-Cross-Bones flew.

But I lie and dream on the docks at night
By the water that laps and croons
Of pirate bands, and of foreign lands
And the ring of bright doubloons:

Of swarthy pirates with scarlet cloaks
And hoops of gold in their ears —
Of ready knives, and of lawless lives,
Of black-browed buccaneers:

Of cutlas and broadsword, and gleaming dirk —
Of treasure and hidden gold,
Of storm-swept decks, and of salvaged wrecks
With casks of rum in the hold:

Wandering Fires

Of vessels trapped in the open seas
And rammed by the pirate's keel —
Of roaring nights, and of fierce-waged fights
And the ring of steel on steel.

They say that the pirate's day is past
And his lawless life on the sea,
That never again on the Spanish Main
Will the black flag flutter free —
But my whole life long, I shall hear the song
That the water has crooned to me.

Wandering Fires

CHAMELEONS

(MANHATTAN ROOF)

VIOLET McDOUGAL

Between the palms are colored lights that play
In sweeping arcs of wonder, swing and sway
In dazzling circles where the dancers glide
Through flashing waves of splendor, brilliant eyed;
Through gorgeous crested seas of rapid light
Electric blue and incandescent white,
Through sudden crimson, orange, amber, chrome,
Prismatic splendors in a seething foam.

Chameleons within a sea of light
The dancers flash in iridescent flight.
Unreal, fantastic in a dizzy stream
Of rippling light, they turn and sway and gleam.

The brasses crash; the dancers sway and glide,
The eerie mockings of the trombone slide
Down changing scales. Through wave on wave of
light
The dancers gleam, their faces oddly white,

Wandering Fires

Then weirdly blue, then sudden lurid green —
Chameleons with jeweled changing sheen,
The dancers shift and glitter, sway and glide.
The strange unearthly music seems to slide
Through realms of ghostly merriment unseen —
The doors of unreality swing wide.

Wandering Fires

THE CALLING SEA

VIOLET MCDUGAL

The wind sweeps in from the marsh at night
And wails like a lost banshee,
And I go down from the quiet town
To stare at the roaring sea.

The wild wind, shrieking of distant lands,
And the green surge, rolling free,
And the riding-lights of the ships at nights
Are signals that call to me.

I watch how the vessels lift and swing,
In the teeth of the racing tide,
Where the great waves roar on the rocky shore
And the pitching barges ride.

So I dream of shipping before the mast,
And sailing to foreign lands —
Of cutting a way through the salt sharp spray
To tropical coral strands.

Wandering Fires

I have watched how the vessels for foreign ports
Stand out to the open sea,
And I must go where the great storms blow
And the lashing wind roars free.

It may be that I shall come back again
To the peace of the little town,
Where the hyacinth grows, and the prim hedge-
rows
Run neatly up and down.

It may be when I have grown tired and old
That the little town will call,
And the quiet days and the sunlit ways
Shall please me most of all.

Wandering Fires

CITY BORN

VIOLET MCDUGAL

Away from the noise of the city streets
Away from the lights of town
Here on the lonely farm we watch
The black nights closing down.

The thick marauding darkness crowding close
Against the blank-eyed windows, all around
The stealthy waiting silence, vacant, vast,
Startled we hear the furtive creaking sound
Of wooden shutters straining in the wind.
The yellow lamp-flame sputters, flaring high
In smoky protest through the deepening gloom
And strange uneasy shadows fill the room
Formless and monstrous, crouching, furtive, sly
In silent menace while they wait to spring.
The blind wind, stumbling, groping, fumbles by
Sucking and mumbling with its toothless gums
At loosened clapboards like an ancient hound
It mouths and gnaws and worries at the eaves,
Scratching and snuffing, circling round and round

Wandering Fires

In whining eagerness to dig its way
Through roof or wall and leap upon its prey.

We long for the hum of the busy streets
For the city's friendly roar
For the clatter and clang when the surface cars
Go by outside the door
For the night-hawk taxis that cruise the streets
For the clamorous days and nights
For the rattle and crash of the shuttling trains
—But the clapboards creak, and the wind complains
And only the loneliness remains
In place of the noise and lights.

NEGROES FROM NASSAU

VIOLET McDOUGAL

FronDED palms in a swaying line,
White hot sand in the hot sunshine,
Giddy waves through the reeling air
Quivering heat, and a blinding glare.

Negroes from Nassau in a chanting line,
Swinging picks in the hot sunshine,
White-hot waves through the dizzy air
Dazzling up from the asphalt glare.

Figures of ebony, lithe and tall
Striking chips from a white stone wall,
Great black negroes that slouch and swing
Half clad giants that chant and sing
To the rhythm of picks that rise and fall
"De wuhk so hahd, an' de pay so small"
Striking chips from a white stone wall
"De wuhk so hahd" —
See them sway and swing,
"An' de pay so small" —

Wandering Fires

Hear them chant and sing
To the indolent picks that rise and fall
“De wuhk so hahd an’ de pay so small.”

Wandering Fires

THE SAWDUST RING

VIOLET McDOUGAL

The smell of the sawdust calls us back
To the old wild life in the ring,
To the thud of hoofs and the sharp whip-crack,
To the ponies that dance on the sawdust track,
To the jingle of bits and the headstall's clack
And the high trapeze's swing.

Through the blinding heat of the summer days
We dream of a crashing band,
Of the tents upthrust through the twilight haze,
Of the glitter and tinsel, the lights ablaze,
Of the chalk-faced clowns and the crowds that gaze—
The life that we understand.

The noise of the city by day and night
Beats in through the open door,
In the clangorous heat and the dull half-light
We are chained to our desks, but we dream of flight
From the city that roars in its savage might,
As our lions used to roar.

Wandering Fires

And some time we shall go back again,
Where the monkeys chatter and swing,
Where the elephant stamps at his picketing-chain
And the caged beasts snarl, and the wagon-train
Crawls out at night on the starlit plain —
Back to the sawdust ring.

THE PATHWAY BY THE POOL

VIOLET MCDUGAL

The moon is cold and clear against the night,
Flooding the ruined garden with its light,
Drenching the sunken pathway by the pool
Where two cold silent satyrs watch and dream
Beside a broken fountain, gleaming white,
Moon-washed against the blackness of the stream.
The wind walks softly by the shadowed pool,
The skies are splashed with silver-shattered stars.
The satyrs dream in endless reverie
With marble lips half smiling in the night;
Disdainful lips curved upward with the white
Cold smile of knowledge, dreaming in the light.
The silence where the moon-drowned shadows die
Stirs with the far off night bird's lonely cry.

Wandering Fires

GREENWICH VILLAGE NIGHTS

VIOLET McDOUGAL

Beyond the glare of Broadway lights,
Up winding stairways, dark and steep,
Where strange fantastic shadows creep,
We find bizarre, exotic nights.

In dingy attics, where the air
Is thick with smoke, and semi-gloom
Fills every corner of the room,
The wind-blown candles flame and flare.

Impressionistic, clever scrawls
Of Spanish dancing-girls with fans,
Of pirates, Arabs, Mexicans,
Are sketched upon the whitewashed walls.

The girl from Main Street, freckled, lean,
Poses with languid drooping gaze,
In imitation of the ways
Of vampire beauties of the screen.

Wandering Fires

Artists with vague impressive air,
And genius struggling to be free,
Chatter of art and anarchy
And shake their long untidy hair.

A creature with chalky, pallid skin
And green eyes glowing, sweeps the strings
Of some antique guitar, and sings,
Her sharp voice cracking high and thin.

Cruel and dangerous and soft,
Her green eyes prowl the smoke-filled air,
Stealthy and furtive, here and there,
Like cats that prowl a vacant loft.

Across the floor the dancers glide
The shadows leap, grotesque and tall
Across the grimy white-washed wall
They twist and slither, sway and slide.

The tourists jostle through the doors;
The eager crowds that search for thrills
Rush in across the dingy sills,
To jam the narrow dancing-floors.

Wandering Fires

Among the softly shadowed lights,
Through realms of make-believe we stray,
Finding a strange fantastic way
Through restless Greenwich Village nights.

Wandering Fires

THE OIL FIRE

VIOLET McDUGAL

The lightning strikes, a sudden blinding flash
Of forkèd fire, a rending, tearing crash,
A deafening roar that shakes the very ground,
A sharp report, a sudden crackling sound!

The tank is struck! the mounting flames leap high
In wild fantastic light against the sky
The strong steel crumples writhing in the heat
Twisting grotesquely, savage heat waves beat

In furnace blasts along the reeling air,
The oil fields lit and crimsoned with the glare
In wild unearthly beauty. Heavy, low
The black smoke hangs above the sullen glow

In rolling clouds with red flames bursting through
The whole earth has a lurid crimson hue,
The curious crowds that gather in to gaze
In half awed silence watch the great tank blaze

Wandering Fires

In devastating splendor. Far and wide
The sullen smoke hangs low on every side. —
The giant tank boils over, everywhere
A boiling flood of flame. The scorching air
Is blistering, blinding, seething torrents flow
In red cascades of flame. The savage glow
Of molten metal smoulders, twisted, scarred
The oil soaked ground is blasted, burned and charred.
All that remains to show the great fire's track
Is smouldering ruin, shriveled, seared and black.

Wandering Fires

UNIVERSITY

VIOLET McDOUGAL

Could I remember ancient wars
When there were summer nights — and stars,
Could I unravel tangled rows
Of figures, when the picture shows
Were flashing out along the street,
And streams of music caught my feet
And wove around them shining strands
Of swift insistence, and my hands
Were full of moonlight cool and sweet?

One day a white fog drifted in
Across the campus ground,
The campus smothered in the mist
Was made of shadowed amethyst —
And changing opalescent light,
A world without a sound.
And when the sudden brass mouthed bell
Came startling me, I knew my lot
Was cast along unhappy lines.
I should have studied — and had not.

Wandering Fires

Could I go sleepless, day by day? —
Outside the hot white sunshine lay —
I saw raw copper sunsets blaze
On hammered anklets, and a maze
Of tawny fur, and gleaming eyes;
Great captive panthers, yawning, rise,
To purr against their burnished chains.
I woke — the vision yet remains —
My pained instructor's cold surprise.

One night the ukuleles sang
Beneath the purple sky,
And all the warm star-scented dark
Was full of wonder, and the spark
And glow of dreaming cigarettes
And fragrance drifting by.
And when the music faded past
I crawled into my iron cot.
The sleepy silence purred around.
I should have studied — and had not.

Could I go dragging chains of sleep
To early class, when I was deep
In dreams unshattered by the shock
And clamour of the wild-eyed clock?

Wandering Fires

Could I remember buried kings? —
I learned to blow pale spiral rings
Of hazy smoke; I learned the sway
And lure of syncopation's way:
I learned — so very many things.

One day the council summoned me
And said that I must go —
The atmosphere was bitter cold,
Their faces were like masks of old,
Like gargoyles made of carven stone —
My standards were too low;
In every class I failed to meet
Requirements, so they said, and yet —
How very strange — I learned so much,
And nothing that I will forget.

THE FIRE-EATER

VIOLET McDOUGAL

The motor crouches by the country road
Behind its glaring headlights. When it goes
It follows, fiercely sucking up, the light
With purring thirst, and where the headlight showed
A moment past, the seething darkness flows.
In blue-black undulating waves of flight
The monster streams away across the night.

A strange fire-eater, eating its own fire
In gulping haste; the darkness closes in
Engulfingly, and presses close behind.
The wind goes singing through the vibrant wire,
The motor, like a flying thing of sin,
Goes gulping yellow fire along the wind,
A strange fire-eating thing without a mind.

Wandering Fires

BIRDS OF PARADISE

VIOLET McDOUGAL

I

The day is done,
And birds of paradise with gleaming wings,
Flitting in glad abandon dream of love;
Fiery and swift, great gorgeous sun-bright things,
Glowing like jewels in the light that swings
And sweeps from out the flaming, changing west;
Huge, burnished tropic birds of joy and fire,
With splendid soaring wings that never tire
Sheer joy of living will not let them rest.
Great glorious-shining, flaming, joyous things,
Flashing the sudden miracle of love,
Sweeping the earth with careless radiant wings,
Unmindful of the wind disaster brings,
They cry of love, love, love, into the night —
Their shining voices stream into the night.
They beat the air with outspread, fire-splashed wings
And call of love, love, love, into the night.

Wandering Fires

II

The end has come,
And birds of paradise with shaking wings,
Shiver around the ashes of dead love;
Stricken and cold, dull weary lifeless things —
Swept by the cutting wind disaster brings,
Their strange wild sudden glory fades and dies,
Their splendor tarnished, and their lustre slain,
Swept out upon a swift dark sea of pain,
Dimmed by a touch, their radiant wonder flies.
Bewildered, broken, baffled, heart-sick things
Cry without ceasing by the grave of love,
Beating the air with frantic futile wings,
Cut by the bitter wind disaster brings.
They cry of love, love, love, into the night;
With dull harsh voices moan into the night.
They trail the earth with weary drooping wings,
And wail of love, love, love, into the night.

Wandering Fires

THE PHANTOM ROUND-UP

VIOLET MCDUGAL

Where the city sleeps in silence,
On a soft star-silvered night
There's a soundless phantom round-up once a year,
And the city seems to vanish
In a flood of ghostly light
While the streets and shops and buildings disappear.

Then a horde of phantom riders
Spur across the starlit waste,
Where the pallid yucca flowers once again;
And the dim coulees are furtive
With the coyotes slinking haste
While the branding fires are lit along the plain.

And the herds of ghostly cattle
Range beneath the quiet stars,
While the wary phantom riders circle wide;
Till they gather there in silence
To let down the misty bars
And corral the milling cattle safe inside.

Wandering Fires

And the shades of vanished bronchos
Plunge in rearing, snorting fright,
Shying wild-eyed on the brink of breaking day,
Till their reckless riders spur them
Into blind and panic flight,
When the eastern sky is slowly turning gray.

So the rattlers and the sage brush
And the riders disappear
When the sun climbs slowly up the eastern sky,
And the city's noisy clamor
Strikes anew upon the ear —
For once more the phantom round-up has gone by.

Wandering Fires

THE SHARK'S JAWS

VIOLET McDOUGAL

There was a chair in old St. Augustine
Of shark's jaws, set and riveted with steel,
A wishing chair. I laughed for I had seen
The others wishing gravely. I could feel
Their earnestness. I laughed and slid between
The heavy jaws, and found the luck was real.

I found cool fronded palms in rows
And warm, white, silver-scented nights,
The streets a-stream with steady lights
Of moving motors, and the shows
A-glitter all along the street,
And music sweeping like a sheet
Of crested foam across the way
From brilliant dance halls on the pier —
The laughing, luring wonder, where
The dancing couples cling and sway.

I idly wished for luck, and turned away.
I laughed because the strange, carved wishing-chair
Was worn smooth with many hands, the way

Wandering Fires

Some idol is worn smooth with kisses where
So many mouths have been. I turned to pay
The fee, and found luck followed me from there.

I left a land of sullen rain —
I found clear crystal sapphire days
With red hibiscus all ablaze
Between tall, feathered palms. Again
I felt the lazy sunlight lie
Across the days. The burning sky
Was changeless wonder. I could feel
The lure of roads that curved between
Strange tropic jungles, and the sheen
Of moonlight on a sea of steel.

The shark's jaws brought me luck—the warm, white
sand,
The turquoise ocean breaking with a roar
Upon the shouting bathers hand in hand;
And casting up the surf boards on the shore;
The gay striped awnings, and the crashing band,
The jewelled shells along the white sea floor,
Laughter and warmth — a tropic wonderland
Of bright, fantastic beauty to explore.

Wandering Fires

SONG OF THE OLD

VIOLET MCDUGAL

In our young and eager days
How we thrilled to blame or praise —
 How we laughed and fought and struggled side by
 side!

But our dreams have faded quite,
For the day draws into night
 And we know no more the spur of youthful pride.

Ah, the visions once we had!
We were young and fierce and glad
 And our blood leaped hot within us in our youth.
But the seasons come and go,
We are old and dull and slow,
 And our dreams have left us face to face with truth.

Youth and joy are past and gone,
Sere old age is creeping on —
 How we used to laugh and dance upon the way!
But our weariness must rest
And for sleep the night is best —
 So to youth we leave the burning heat of day.

Wandering Fires

We are old and dull with pain

And we'll never know again

 All the beauty and the wonder that we knew.

Now we rest upon our oars,

And we drift to stranger shores,

 For the struggle and the weariness are through.

Wandering Fires

ROBERT

VIOLET McDOUGAL

I.

I wonder what has become of Robert —
He was killed in the fighting in the Argonne
And buried there
Somewhere —

II.

But somehow I cannot think
That he is lying still in the ground
While the worms crawl through him,
That does not seem
Like Robert's way
Somehow —

III.

And yet — I cannot think he went to Heaven.
He used to wear those bright tan shoes
I hated so,
And he used to drink his coffee

Wandering Fires

Out of his saucer,
And get his thumb in it,
And he thought Mutt and Jeff
Were funny,
Not that that would make any difference —
Only —
He used to be cross to me
Lots of times
And he was always making fun
Of poor old Mrs. Miller to her face
And so —
I cannot think he went to Heaven.

IV.

And still —
I cannot think he went to Hell,
He was always so good
To remember to bring things
From the store,
And once
He brought me a present
All the way
From Paducah,
A silk dress, red,

Wandering Fires

I never could wear it,
But still —
I cannot think that Robert went to Hell.

V.

He was killed in the fighting in the Argonne
And buried there,
Somewhere,
But all the time
I keep saying to myself
I wonder what has become of Robert.

THE EATING OF THE MOONFIRE

VIOLET McDOUGAL

On a reef of silver moonlight —
Ah the days and nights of grief —
We were wrecked upon a silver moonlight shore,
And the shadows crept and lengthened
On the silver moonlight reef,
Where we heard the shallow breakers seethe and roar.

And she wandered down the moonway
Singing softly as she went,
Till she vanished in the roaring of the tide,
And I searched in vain to find her
Till the silver night was spent
While the shallow breakers foamed and seethed and
died.

So I found her in the shadows
By a pool of silver flame
With the moonflame on her lips and in her hands,
She had eaten drifted moonfire
Till the white moonmadness came,
And the pallid moonfire dripped upon the sands.

Wandering Fires

By her side a white snow-leopard
Lay in slim and silent grace
And it lapped the drifted moonflame as it lay,
And she wandered singing softly
With the moonlight on her face,
And the leopard fawned upon her in its play.

So they vanished down the moonway,
And they left me to my grief, —
Ah the madness in the pool of drifted flame —
And the shallow silver breakers
Foamed anew along the reef, —
Ah the sorrow when the white moonmadness came.

WAR

VIOLET McDOUGAL

The sleeping land is startled with a cry
That cuts the silence like a tongue of flame;
That rises, echoing through the quiet sky
And speaking, shrills of life and lasting fame,
And mutters low, of death without a name.
Through endless avenues of time and space,
It hurtles with its harsh insistent claim;
It thunders on the Heaven's iron face
And clamors war, war, war to wake a slumbering
race.

The cities are a-seethe with sudden life,
The quiet land has wakened from its sleep,
The restless crowds are eager for the strife;
From lip to lip the ready rumors leap,
And staring-eyed, the trampling crowd like sheep
Go pressing forward without thought or care.
And, left alone the helpless women weep.
A torrent of excitement sweeps the air —
The bugles shrill and call; the wild-mouthed trump-
ets blare.

Wandering Fires

The staring crowds surge past; uneasy men
With restless shifting feet and eager eyes;
The bugles sweep the crowded streets again —
A savage rush of music, and the skies
Are rent with thundering drums and frenzied cries—
A riot of wild music, blazing lights,
The uproar of the wakened cities rise
A whirl of madness, and the flaming flights
Of showering rockets stream; go seething through the
 nights.

The sky is shattered with the maddened roar
Of myriad guns with crashing iron lips,
And where the breakers clamor on the shore,
The fog lifts slowly from the gleaming ships.
The wind is like a tide of steel that rips
And crashes where the iron surges ring
And tears the clinging fog in tattered strips.
The sky, flame-bitten seems a bloody thing.
The shells go screaming past. The bullets whine and
 sing.

The ruined land lies blasted in the light,
The velvet shrouding shadows fade and die;
The women, who had not the strength to fight,
The women, who have not the heart to cry,

Wandering Fires

Trail wearily beneath a barren sky;
Go moaning to their work in shop and field,
With bitter envy for the ones who lie
Beneath them. And the kindly shadows shield
Great sheaves of garnered bones, the fruitful harvest's
yield.

THE WALLS OF OSSINING

SING-SING PRISON

VIOLET MCDUGAL

There was a thin fine crystal rain
The night I came to Ossining.
It all comes crowding back again,
A soft spring night, a thin fine rain,
The jarring rumble of the train
And then — the walls of Ossining.

The great gray walls are grim and hard,
The prison walls of Ossining,
The rugged walls are bleak and scarred —
Outside I see the pacing guard,
The gray slag heap they call the yard, —
The prison walls of Ossining.

Five years in striped captivity
Within the walls of Ossining, —
Through steel barred windows I can see
The Hudson running far and free,

Wandering Fires

In strong unfettered liberty
Outside the walls of Ossining.

· · · · ·
Beyond the walls of Ossining
The bluebirds flash and dart and sing, —
And winter fades away in spring, —
We watch it here in Ossining.

POEMS
BY
MARY McDOUGAL
(Mrs. Ivar Axelson)

Wandering Fires

THE WAVES

MARY McDOUGAL

The waves are galloping ponies
With winds in their flying mane,
That run and nibble the sugary sand,
And scamper away again. *am.*

i The waves are glittering tigers
Flung snarling on the land,
That writhe and twist in the grips of death,
And claw away the sand.

The waves are purple elephants
That charge with sudden roar,
That trumpet and shout to the shaken moon,
And trample away the shore.

The waves are green-haired mermaids
With thrifty little hands,
Who, fetching brooms and pails and mops,
Come bringing back the sands.

THE SILVER SEA GULL

MARY McDOUGAL

The Silver Sea Gull is flying to-day
West and West from New York Bay —
How it lures the hearts of the lads away!
(Oh follow the Silver Sea Gull!)

The farm boys leave their plows and flails
To hear the Sea Gull's strange salt tales
Of Seas and ships and monstrous gales
(Oh follow the Silver Sea Gull!)

The town lads leave the shop and mill
To learn the Sea Gull's daring will
Which reckons naught of risk nor ill
(Oh follow the Silver Sea Gull!)

The ranch boys leave their ranging herds
To heark to the Sea Gull's wild glad words
And their hearts fly out to the sea like birds
(Oh follow the Silver Sea Gull!)

Wandering Fires

And wherever the Silver Sea Gull flies
A green fire flames into lads' hot eyes
And some of them leave all things that be
And follow on to the tumbling sea
But most of them slowly turn away
Back to the tasks of yesterday.
But awake or asleep in their dreaming, they
Still follow the Silver Sea Gull.

Wandering Fires

I MARVEL AT MAN

MARY McDOUGAL

I marvel at Man.
Flung through time and space,
With burning stars about him,
He busies himself
Making shiny little mouth harps
And red flowered axminster carpets
And strange mouldy cheeses.
He suffers through
A torturing hell of his own making,
And then jests about the trenches
And makes quips about bombs and typewriter guns.
Yet in his soul, vast stretches eternity
And light and darkness forever contend.
And in his heart is rising
A great tide of revolt
Which will sweep away
This man-made-hell.
As he makes shiny mouth harps
And red flowered carpets,
And jests about war —
I marvel at Man.

COVER YOUR FACES

Written on the death of Michael Collins

MARY MCDUGAL

Cover your faces, O Women —
All you women of Ireland!
Cover your faces with your long hair
And weep into its darkness!

Yet weep not for the lad with the brave gay eyes,
Not for the lad with the sweetly turned lips,
Not for the lad with the laugh that is stopped —
No, not for Michael Collins,
Although he lies strangely straight and still.
Yet weep not even for him!

Cover your faces, O Women —
All you women of Ireland!
Cover your faces with your long hair
And weep into its darkness!

Yet weep not for her whose spirit walked always at
his side,
Not for her whose eyes leaped to his eyes,

Wandering Fires

Not for her whose laugh answered his laugh,
Not for her whose heart spoke to his heart.
No, not for Kitty Kiernan — the woman
Whom this man loved —
Weep not even for her.

Weep not for Michael Collins, the quenched flame;
Weep not for Kitty Kiernan, the broken flower.
But weep, O women,
For all the lads of Ireland —
The glorious lads of Ireland,
Shattering each other's beautiful bodies,
Breaking each other's quivering hearts —
Brother against brother —
Brother against brother!

Weep, all you women of Ireland,
And weep all you women of the world,
Until your weeping is always a pitiful murmuring in
their ears —
Until your tears are always a pitiful dripping on their
hearts!
Until they shall let their guns fall to the ground,
Until they shall stretch out their hands to each other,
Crying, "Brother! Brother! Brother!"

Wandering Fires

Cover your faces, O women —
All you women everywhere!
Cover your faces with your long hair
And weep into its darkness!

Wandering Fires

THE MOUNTAIN

MARY McDOUGAL

Purple and rose
The mountain goes,
And the thought in her heart
No mortal knows.

The great black pines
Make mystic signs
And draw on the sky
Strange secret lines.

O Mountain Old
How can you hold
The thought of your heart
So long untold!

THE FLOODS OF THE MOON

MARY McDUGAL

We cannot breast the white floods of the moon,
They soon will rise and sweep all earth and sky,
Come my Beloved — while there yet is time
Before they reach us and we drown and die —
O sweet, mad, sweeping flood tides of the moon!

The moon has swept away the anchored stars —
Its white floods rise and pour upon the town!
O my Beloved we have stayed too long —
The wild moon floods have caught us and we
drown —
O sweet, mad, sweeping flood tides of the moon!

Wandering Fires

A SONG OF THE SEA

MARY McDUGAL

I run to meet the calling sea,
I plunge into the foam,
Its eager lips are greeting me,
All happy things are yet to be —
I know I have come home!

The glad waves sing of Japanese
Beyond a turquoise bay —
Beneath the lovely cherry trees
With curving arms and gleaming knees
They flaunt the surf at play.

The white waves call of the storms' swift spume,
When topsails twist and turn,
When ships laugh high in the face of doom,
Or shuddering, lurch to a deep far tomb
Where their lonely sisters yearn.

The swift waves shrill of such delight
My eyes have never seen,

Wandering Fires

When through the palm-hung, moon-drenched
night

The slim brown men like daggers bright
Flash downward through the green.

The laughing waves are singing where,
Beyond a golden land
The laughing mermaids comb their hair
That glitters in the golden air
More than the glittering sand.

The slow waves murmur a slumbrous song
To the dead in their cool, still caves —
A muffled croon to them ages long,
Have their lives been tragic or restless or wrong,
There is peace here under the waves.

Together will we dare the sea
We'll dare the sea together
And he will stretch his hand to me
As from the land we laughing flee
All in the white-blue weather.

And I shall know such ecstasy,
My lover by my side —

Wandering Fires

That all the singing heart of me
Will join the singing of the sea
The lifting of the tide.

CROSSING THE DESERT

MARY MCDUGAL

The Pullman loungers saw low dust clouds fly —
I watched great covered wagons lumber by.

They let the whistle of our engine drown
My screams as shrieking Indians rode me down.

The drifting smoke was all that they could see —
But bold Kit Carson rode there far and free
And Hi-ki-yi'd and flung his hat to me.

Wandering Fires

SILENCES

MARY McDOUGAL

You told me of the wide eyes of a lad you killed in the war, and your voice went on into silence — and the silence was like a sick thing that drags itself into a corner to die.

We walked, singing, through the wood, hand in hand, and then we fell silent — and our silence was like a broad-winged silver bird floating high above the trees.

You turned to me with the sunset on your face, and cried my name, and there was a sudden silence — and the silence was like a great flaming lily that bloomed as we looked — flinging out red and purple stars.

Now you are gone, and the whole world is filled with silence — and the silence is like a thin gray mist, ever sifting, sifting, sifting through the stubble of an old corn field.

MARDI GRAS IN CONEY ISLAND

MARY McDOUGAL

Mardi Gras! Mardi Gras!
Mardi Gras in Coney Island!
Pink rains
Blue rains
Orange rains
Lavender rains—
Confetti rides on the wind —
Everybody is flinging it in bright drops.
Confetti is meshed in my hair
It gives a flat papery taste
To the hot dog sandwich I am eating.
See the big cops grin
As the pretty girls lace their blue shoulders
With confetti!
Confetti is everywhere —
The very stars spit confetti —
Blue and orange and pink and lavender!

Everything is tumbling and whirling and laughing!
Long streamers whip the air

Wandering Fires

Like little crazy rainbows
Playing hookey from the sky.
See the floats —
Adam and Eve —
And The Fountain of Youth —
And Somebody's Plumbing Supplies!
Hear the gorgeous blare!
Hear the rattle and blare
Of the bands — of the bands —
Of the marching tramping bands!

Everything is tumbling and whirling and laughing!
Men in red striped overalls
And girls in blue and yellow harlequin suits
Laughing, scrambling, chasing each other —
Galloping on wooden horses madly up and down
 long hills,
Cascading down tumbling slides —
Whirling wildly around in big wooden bowls.
(Oh young puppies, rolling in the grass!)

Everything is tumbling and whirling and laughing!
Through the pink and orange and blue and lavender
 rains
The big peacock signs turn and twist,

Wandering Fires

The great sparkling ferris wheels whirl against the
sky,

The crowd calls, and laughs and jostles!

Yes, there is something that does not tumble and
whirl and laugh.

Over the twinkling white towers

Hangs a still gold moon

Far and dim and disdainful

And yet —

And yet —

It seems a trifle amused

At the quaint little humans

Who can so disport themselves

Before the dropping

Of the last sure black curtain

Through their pink and orange

And blue and lavender rains!

Wandering Fires

A WOMAN'S SONG*

MARY McDOUGAL

The Lord God painted the sunset
And hung it against the sky,
The Lord God tore up the great ribbed rocks
And flung them mountain high:

And I have ruffled the thin white lawn
To curtain the window pane,
And I have mended the broken walls
Uncertain against the rain.

The Lord God measured the great green sea,
And counted its heart in hours,
He sent His forkèd fire from Heaven
To bring Him a chart of the flowers.

And I have made a rainbow thing
For a quilt on the worn old bed,

* Awarded First Prize in Lyric Contest of General Federation of Women's Clubs in 1923.

Wandering Fires

And I have drawn a magic ring
Where gentle words are said.

God made the world while lightning played
Below the purple dome;
And, under a low roof, I have made
The miracle of Home.

Wandering Fires

AT NINE AND SIX

MARY MCDUGAL

Just before nine o'clock in the morning
This is what you see about the big department store—
Girls running from every direction —
Skinny girls, dark girls, tall girls, blonde girls —
Hats askew, bosoms heaving,
Hair hanging in wisps.
Why are all the girls running
With such panic in their faces?
They are afraid they will be late
At their work in the big department store.
No excuses are good.
You must be on time.
O girls — hurry
Hurry girls — hurry, hurry, hurry.

Just after six o'clock in the afternoon
This is what you see about the big department store—
Hundreds of men standing in ranks outside —
Banks of silent faces turned expectantly
Toward the big doors that swing in and out:

Wandering Fires

Waiting faces, waiting eyes,
Waiting eyes, waiting faces.
Why do all these waiting men stand so expectantly?
They are waiting for the girls, the pretty dark girls,
The laughing, blonde girls, the little skinny girls
Who are coming from their work in the big department store.
Some of them are fathers and brothers,
Some of them are husbands,
Some of them are lovers,
Some of them are dark wolves of prey
That slink around corners at night.
O girls — hurry
Hurry girls — hurry, hurry, hurry.

Wandering Fires

ON EAST RIVER

MARY McDOUGAL

NOTE: The newspapers tell how a heavy ebb tide tore a fleet of coal barges from their moorings and sent them whirling down New York's East River. But for the warning of the Radio and the quick work of police boats and tugs, many passenger vessels would have been wrecked by the wild barges.

The ebb tide was secret
The ebb tide was wicked —
It laughed as it swept out of Hell Gate Channel—
It laughed a wicked laugh
As it dragged at the barges.

Great coal barges,
Black and slow and sullen,
Tied at their moorings
In the swirling river.

The tide set its teeth
And braced for the struggle —
And pulled at the barges
And dragged at the barges —
The great coal barges
In the swirling river.

Wandering Fires

The ropes went snapping —
The wicked tide had conquered them.
The barges shook their ugly heads
And started down the river.

Muttering, crashing, ramming one another,
The barges made a wall of death
Plunging through the jagged rocks,
Rushing down the river.

Whisper Radio!
Whisper Radio!
There are yachts all unknowing,
There are steamers drawing nearer!
Tell them! Tell them quickly
Of the sea-crazed barges!

There's a great white boat
There's a boat like a Queen —
Due up the river
Due up the river —
There's a queenly boat
With her decks of laughing passengers
Due up the river for Boston!

Wandering Fires

Whisper Radio!
Whisper Radio!
Frantically, desperately,
Whisper to the Queen
To the great white Queen
That a black wall of death
Is raging down the river —
Mad coal barges
Sweeping down the river
Like wild black horses
Plunging down the river!

See the brave little tugs
Fight the big black barges
Trying to catch them, to check them,
To stop them!
While the wicked tide laughs
And the Radio whispers,
Frantically, desperately
Of the mad, black death
That is plunging down the river.

Oh the steamers have heard,
And the yachts have heard —
And the great white Queen

Wandering Fires

Who was sailing up the river
She has heard!
She has heard!
She has heard!

Wandering Fires

MY PLUM-TREE

MARY McDOUGAL

If I had a little child —
When my plum-tree blooms and snows
I'd tell it how the fairy folk
Are hanging out their clothes.

And when the plums are green and hard
I'd show it where the wee green hen
Lays green eggs in our yard.

And when the plums are gold and round
I'd point the fairy pumpkins out
Adropping to the ground.

And when they glow red-amber fire
We'd say the sun was lighting up
Jap lanterns for the bird's gay choir.

Ah, if I had a little child
Beneath my lovely, lovely tree
What dear, queer tales we'd weave, we'd dream!
My little child and me.

CARLOTTA, WHO MUST DIE,
TO HER BODY

MARY McDOUGAL

Oh, how can I leave you, Little White Body!
Little Friend Body!
Like a silver fish you have slipped through the water!
Like a hound have you leaped the hedges!
Like a bird have you lifted your lovely head
And sung, sung, sung to the Great Round Sun!
Oh, Little White Body, must I leave you?

Wandering Fires

ONE NIGHT

MARY MCDUGAL

I know there was a Rose that night
A merry, laughing crimson Rose
And voices ran along a path
The path of words that no man knows.

And in the silences the books
Kept speaking from the dim-lit walls,
Like bells that stir within a dream
Or secret shadowed waterfalls.

And then a slim white doe fled by
With eyes that glimmered like the moon,
And shining hooves that flashed and waned
And played a brittle tinkling tune.

A sudden monstrous plant bloomed out,
A thing of things that cannot be,
And yet it reared its magic height
With brain to plan and eye to see.

Wandering Fires

And underneath the silences
Pierrot's faint glittering laughter rang —
I heard his silver splashing tears,
And Ah! the song — the song he sang!

Wandering Fires

THE PLAINS OF SILENCE

MARY MCDUGAL

Up from the wild, swift sea of tears
You come on the Silent Plains,
Where white fogs muffle the passing years,
And gray-faced joys and dream-dulled fears
Drift by through the silent rains.

Down from the hills of bitter strife
You come on the Silent Plains,
Where silence is dull-drugged wine of life,
And the throbbing wounds from the traitor's knife
Are dimmed to but half-felt pains.

Out of the clutching mire of shame
You come on the Silent Plains,
Where the white fog stifles the wind of blame,
And disgrace has never a sign nor name
To color its fading stains.

And here are the loves that were never told,
With dreams in a wistful band,

Wandering Fires

And longings colored with blood and gold,
But all of them fly from the heart's loosed hold
Like birds from the opened hand.

And the breath of the plains is a still content
Where the drifting shadows go,
And restless dreams with the fog are blent,
And silence into the heart is sent
Like an arrow from a bow.

I come to you, land where the dreamers dream
With silence in their veins,
O Silent Plains, where all things seem
But the drifting shade of a half-dreamed dream —
I come to you, wonderful plains!

Wandering Fires

THE SUBWAY ACCIDENT

MARY McDOUGAL

You could hear 'em screaming from down under the
ground —
Shrieking and struggling and calling —
Horrible sounds coming up through the grating of the
subway
Into the bright sunshine of the street —
Men and women and children, choking and stran-
gling,
A hundred feet under the ground.

Gassed they was!
And then they was dragged up and stretched out on
the sidewalks,
Hundreds of 'em —
With doctors and firemen and nurses working over
'em,
Pumping air into 'em.
Gassed.
And the crowds gathered and jammed around, white,
they was so excited.

Wandering Fires

Why, the whole city was just like that — clean white
with excitement.

Gee! I couldn't help but think of them days in France
When men was gassing other men —

On purpose —

Meant to —

Men with lungs just as tender as them folks' lungs in
the subway.

(But, Gee, you never saw a guy just fresh gassed,
did you?

With his awful eyes, and that stuff oozing out of the
corners of his mouth.)

Say, this is what I mean,

We all done it on purpose, you see —

Gassed each other.

We gassed the Germans to make the world safe —

For something or other.

And they gassed us because they said

We wouldn't let 'em have a place in the sun —

Or something like that.

Anyway, here's what I'm trying to say:

It wasn't no accident then;

We all done it on purpose.

And everybody said "Hooray!"

Wandering Fires

(Except the fellows with that stuff oozing out of the
corners of their mouths.)

Yes, New York said "Hooray," too.

New York didn't wring her hands over them boys
that was gassed.

(And even now they keep spitting up rotten lungs,
and dying.)

Oh, it ain't that I'm not sorry for them folks that
got gassed in the subway —

Only —

Well, folks are just funny, that's all.

THE SHADOW

MARY McDUGAL

I run across the morning sands to meet the waves in
play

And swift and glad, my shadow goes before me all
the way.

And when the evening candles burn, in rose and gold
and gray,

She folds her wistful hands, and kneels beside me as
I pray.

But when my lover comes to me, while twilight
flutters dim,

My shadow lifts her purple wings, and leaves me
there with him.

Wandering Fires

TO AN INVALID

MARY McDOUGAL

Oh, my heart is full of wishes
But my hands are bare and small,
And it's little, Darling, little,
I can do for you at all.

I would hold the yellow sun
Flooding just outside your door
Till the rising moon made patterns—
Silver patterns on the floor.

And my friend, the cluster rose
I would lattice overhead
With its gentle petals drifting
On your eyes — about your bed.

I would bring the cooling sea,
White capped waves with feet of blue,
Near your window, curling, singing,
Throwing glittering smoke to you.

Wandering Fires

Oh, my heart is full of wishes
But my hands are bare and small —
And it's little, Darling, little
I can do for you at all.

Wandering Fires

WHEN I RUSH OUT INTO THE SUN

MARY McDOUGAL

When I rush out into the sun
Wherein the leaves dance one by one,
I toss my hair and leap and run
 And shout in sheer delight.
The sun is liquid in my veins;
The leaves are gold and crimson rains;
The snapping twigs are broken chains
 To speed my soul's glad flight.

And then I soar among the stars
And tiptoe on the heavenly bars
 I sing a roundelay
And all the angels far and near
Come out to whisper and to hear
What mortal sings so wild and clear
 Into the face of day.

And then I lose this mood so wild
And fly to where my little child
 Lies sleeping in her cot,

Wandering Fires

With sweet hands tangled in her hair.
My heart leaps out to find her there
And folds her in its loving care
 With sun and stars forgot!

Wandering Fires

THE CLOUD

MARY McDUGAL

The Wife Speaks:

When I got up to start the day
The sea and sky were dim and gray.
Then from my kitchen, overhead,
I saw one drifting cloud flame red.
Beyond the earth and ocean gray
Beyond the dim edge of the day
It looked into some far strange place
And saw the splendor of God's face.
It reached into some singing space
And caught the glory of God's face.
"Oh, John, get up and see the sky,
A sign from God Himself burns high!"

The Husband Speaks:

She waked me up
Just to see a pink cloud.
My wife waked me up
When I was so tired
After hauling sand and gravel all day.

Wandering Fires

She made me lose half an hour of good sleep —
My wife did —
To see a cloud,
Just a darned pink cloud!

THE JOKE

MARY MCDUGAL

"Curse the church!"
Said Bill the Soak,
Lolling about the booze-joint
Sneering at his Sunday-school-going
Wife and daughter.
"I ain't been inside
One of the damned places
For twenty years
And I'll never be inside one again!"
But the next week
For the sake of his wife
They carried him up the aisle
Of the little white church
In a neat black coffin,
While the Sunday-school mates
Of his daughters
Dressed in white
Threw white roses
Up and down the aisle

Wandering Fires

In front of him.
So the joke was on Bill
After all.

Wandering Fires

CHRISTMAS TREES

MARY McDOUGAL

Little Christmas trees are growing,
While the little winds are blowing,
While the little winds are still —
Oh, the Christmas trees are growing on the hill.

Little pine cone candles swaying
Where the glittering stars are playing
Snow like tinsel, sparkling white
And God's sweet toys the birds, a lovely sight.

.

But they are not sad nor chill
Far upon their lonely hill
These Christmas trees no child will ever light;
For, with glad eyes open wide,
Little children who have died
Laugh and sing and dance about them all the night.

Wandering Fires

SPECTACLES

MARY McDOUGAL

Two chips of glass.

Before — I never saw the stars,
Nor butterflies with painted bars,
Nor blades of grass.

The yellow bees

I never saw, nor little birds,
But only heard their friendly words
From blurred, green trees.

The world did seem

Vague, dull — I knew not why;
I only knew all earth and sky
Dim as a dream.

And then these bits of glass!

Oh, myriad life! Oh, wonder sight!
Oh, jeweled world! Oh, star-hung night!
My soul goes dancing with delight!
Thank God for chips of glass!

Wandering Fires

MY TYPEWRITER COVER

MARY McDUGAL

At night I leave my desk in disorder,
My waste basket jammed
And my typewriter open.

Every morning
I find my desk in order,
My waste basket empty for the day's work,
And my typewriter covered from the dust.
I wonder who carefully puts that cover on,
Night after night.
What kind of a man is he?
Has he children at home,
To whom he represents all knowledge and power?
Is he questioning Heaven and Hell and eternity?
Are his knotted hands beating upon the iron sky?
Does he resent having, every night, to cover the type-
writer
Of a man he has never known? —
I wonder!

Wandering Fires

But may be it is done by one of the scrub women
I see scrubbing the stairs every night.
Dull and faded rags of women —
They are thinking of nothing, I know,
With their pale, dull eyes forever on the ground.

Wandering Fires

MOCKING BIRDS

MARY McDOUGAL

Tonight two crystal mocking birds,
Two little silver mocking birds,
Two starry-hearted mocking birds
Sing in the moon's delight.

They fling out glittering silver chips
That fall as if from laughing lips
Or jewel crusted finger tips —
All in the moon's delight.

They fence with sparkling beaks of glass,
That shine like steel, that glow like brass —
They thrust and fence and feint and pass,
All in the moon's delight.

They go weaving crystal rainbows in the moon-
light
That shatter into tinkling, cooling rain,
They go blowing silver bubbles in the moonlight
That float and break and form and float again.

Wandering Fires

They fill the air with wheeling birds
With flame-blue wings and crimson breasts,
With jet black wings and yellow crests,
That soar moon-wise, and sing
Their own sweet, gay or plaintive songs, —
My mockers make them all
There in the white moon's thrall,
There in the moon's delight.

SOMEONE IS PIECING A QUILT

MARY McDUGAL

Someone is piecing a quilt —
With the yellow jonquils below my window,
With the red pain of my heart,
With the silver white of the baby's stare
When she first wakes in the morning,
With the strange green-gold of the sun after a rain,
With the black shadow of the fear that waits always
 behind a door of my mind,
With the white satin of the morning,
And the purple velvet of the night,
Someone
Somewhere
Is piecing a quilt.

FROM KANSAS

MARY McDOUGAL

I placed a common sunflower in her hand,
As she lay dead among the hot-house flowers.
The others there could never understand —
They did not know the country that was ours.

She loved the people of the sweeping plain;
The open hearts beneath the open sky;
The gold sunflowers that glimmered in the rain,
Or turned to see the great sun rise and die.

And she, remembering sunflowers that came springing
Across our dug-out roof of Kansas sod,
I know will take my sunflower and go singing
To plant it in the lily-beds of God.

Wandering Fires

SOME DAY

MARY McDOUGAL

When New York's towers have tumbled down,
And weeds grow rank in the streets of the town,
Then I'll come with my gypsy children brown
 And tell them the strange old tale —
How people lived and loved and died
In the crowded cells of the city of pride
While the green hills called and the sea gulls cried
 And the lovely moon hung pale.

And then how they suddenly waked one day
And followed their singing dreams away
Out to the hills where the green trees sway
 And all the world was a-flower
And my children's eyes will grow round and bright
In the strange old tale in the sunset's light
And we'll play at hide-and-seek half the night
 In the ruins of the Woolworth tower.

THE EMIGRANT

MARY MCDUGAL

It cannot be a strange countree
I'll take the sun along
The sun from Home a-riding in the sky!
It cannot be a strange countree
I'll take along the stars
That twinkle while the quare old world whirls by.
It cannot be a strange countree
I'll take along the moon,
With silver hair all tangled in the trees.
It cannot be a strange countree —
I'll take my dreams of you
No land could be a strange countree with these!

Wandering Fires

A WANDERING SONG

MARY McDOUGAL

Wherever suns of copper rise and set,
Wherever moons are white or waters foam,
Wherever lightnings flame or whirlpools fret,
Wherever swift winds sweep or slow winds roam,
I'll hang my hat on the horn of a glittering star
And know I have found a happy welcome home.

GIVE ME NO MORE BEAUTY

MARY McDOUGAL

Give me no more beauty for it hurts my heart —
No more white sudden moons above black towers,
No more red suns that burn the clouds apart,
No waves that glass and foam along the hours;
Give me long level downs all filled with mist,
Unchanged, unchanging as the long years go,
Where earth and sky are lifeless amethyst —
Where eyes are dim and healing hearts are slow.
I think I cannot bear the sea again —
Its awful glory and its voice of fate —
Its beauty leaps with iron hands of pain
And beats upon my quivering heart's frail gate.
Give me that faint land where the dim dreams start—
All glad and sudden beauty hurts my heart.

THE GLITTERING DRUDGE

MARY McDOUGAL

At school she wore old clothes
Given her by the neighbors
Who meant well without doubt.
She always had a draggled, down-at-the-heel look,
And hurried thru with her studies
To get home to look after
Innumerable little brothers and sisters.
For her mother was forever ailing
And her father usually drinking
And always vicious.
I do not think her body was very strong,
For her great eyes always looked weary.
At any rate she died quietly one day,
And the neighbors chipped in and bought her a casket
dress.
It was the only new thing she had ever worn,
I'll warrant.
And it was not beautiful,
Being selected for neatness,

Wandering Fires

And because it was cheap, being marked down for a sale.

And so she was buried — never having once complained

At not having pretty things “like other girls.”

And now I think of happy chattering girl angels

Busy about her,

Snipping and fitting,

Lengths of sun-lace cloth,

Scarfs of moon glamour,

And gorgeous draperies of flaming cloud.

Her great eyes sparkle like the stars

Enmeshed in misty hair.

Her poor tired heart catches the lilting laughter

Of the maids

As she surveys herself in Heaven's mirage

Made beautiful at last,

A glittering drudge.

Maybe I only think of her thus,

Because it makes me more comfortable.

Wandering Fires

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

MARY McDOUGAL

I found a house upon a hill
Where red geraniums burn,
And in the rocks
Great hollyhocks
Swing and sway and turn.

The house was full of half guessed things,
They passed me on the stair —
They brushed my face with vivid wings
That lit the quivering air.

I half heard wistful weeping dim
And when I hunted there
A host of shadowy seraphim
Told rainbow beads in prayer.

I felt the stir of questing sighs
And laughter's lightning flare;
Then great songs swept the eager skies
And stilled the hymning there.

Wandering Fires

I know not what the spell may be
In the house upon the hill
But it fed white fire
To my high desire
That flames and soars there still.

Wandering Fires

THE FOG

MARY McDOUGAL

The fog was banked above the bay
In shifting mountains for a day,
With purple valleys leading down
Into the dreaming purple town.

Between the hills the white fog drifts
And from the canyon drives and lifts —
Lost angels with their wistful wings,
Soul-weary with long wanderings.

The fog above the streets at night
Is strangely red against the light;
An unreal glory sifting down
Upon the sick and garish town.

And all the day and night it seems
That all things pass except my dreams;
The mountains fade, the glory dies,
The lost white angels search the skies —
But all the day and long night through
I hold my deathless dreams of you.

THE WORLD

MARY McDUGAL

When I was sure and young, and life was eager and
free,
The world was a glittering star that stopped to wait
for me.

And when the birds of love came flashing through
the air,
I wore the world — a red rose — twisted in my hair.

But now I have killed the joy in your faithful eyes,
O Sweet!
And the world is a pile of cinders that rattle beneath
my feet.

THE DREAM TRAPPER

MARY McDOUGAL

I will make a silver net
With a rare and cunning art,
Meshing threads of hope and faith
With the quick strings from my heart.

I will bait my silver net
With my shining thoughts of you,
Flowers from that breathless hour
When the spinning world was new.

I will take my silver net
Where the drifting dream birds be,
I will hang it from the stars,
I will spread it to the sea.

I will tangle in my net
Strange and lovely rainbow things,
Dreams of crimson, gold and blue,
Great white dreams with spreading wings.

Wandering Fires

Crimson dreams will warm my heart!
Blue dreams cool my thirst and heat,
But the white dreams, Soul's Delight
I will lay at your white feet!

Wandering Fires

MAKING HARBOR

MARY MCDUGAL

I was alone in a beautiful world,
Alone with my boat and the sea —
In a moon-white world,
In an old, old world,
Where no man lived but me.

I steered her straight for a far, dim light
On the edge of the old, old sea;
For a lone, far light,
For a half-dreamed light,
Where the harbor called to me.

And then went blooming a hundred lights
As I steered her in from the sea;
And I grieved for my world,
My beautiful world —
But the harbor had called to me.

Then I heard far sounds from the docks and streets—
I had almost done with the sea.

Wandering Fires

I had lost my world,
My old, old world
Where no man lived but me.

The laugh of a woman, the bark of a dog
Came flaunting the sound of the sea;
I had sailed from yesterday
Into today —
All — but the heart of me.

THE PARALYTIC

MARY McDOUGAL

My arms are curious wooden logs that do not move
at my will,
My feet are half-quick blocks of stone that are
strangely hung in their place;
But my living heart keeps crying and lifting to you
still,
And as long as my thankful eyes can move, they will
follow your dream-white face.

MISCELLANY

Wandering Fires

A LIMOUSINE PASSES

MARY McDUGAL

There was hell-for-two in the long glistening gray limousine which rolled past the corner where ordinary people waited for their street cars.

A woman who stood there figuring on whether to buy a new rug for the dining room and make the old curtains do, or to buy new curtains and make the old rug do, saw only a big car with a man and woman in the back seat.

"They have a cylinder missing," thought the dark unshaven man on the curb. "I wonder if their stupid chauffeur knows it."

"What a dear veil that rich girl has on," a waitress who was all yellow spangles, said to herself. And she fell to wondering how John would like her with one done so, under her chin.

"The young man does not look happy" thought the woman in black.

"Gee! ain't that a peach of a car," shrilled the freckled boy to his companion. "I'll soon have enough money saved up to get that motor wheel for

Wandering Fires

my bicycle. Then won't I show them some speed!"

The short, square-jawed chap with the fat sample case threw back his shoulders as he determined, "My little woman is going to have an auto like that some day, by George."

"Them swells ride around in their cars when other folks are starving. I'd like to smash that glass in their faces" was the thought which went through the mind of the man in the shabby slouch hat.

The sun struck against the polished body of the great car and flashed dazzlingly past a baby. It blinked and chuckled and grabbed after the light with fatly creased hands.

And in the gray glistening limousine as it rolled by, sat the man and woman in their own little upholstered hell-for-two.

FROM A CITY WINDOW

MYRTLE A. McDOUGAL

(Mrs. D. A. McDougal)

I looked from out a city window
And saw a white rain wildly falling —
The thunder crashed among the raindrops
And flung them shattered on the pavements
Far underneath my tower window.

Inside where lamps were glowing yellow
Sat people sipping fairy dew-drops
From out of tinkling crystal goblets,
Inside the gold brocaded window.

Outside were flags of purple darkness
That whipped and beat against the window.
Outside were plunging birds of thunder
That made the window shake and quiver.

And then a sunbeam tore the curtain
And there a street lay darkly gleaming,
With little people moving on it
Far underneath my city window.

Wandering Fires

And then — a sudden silver river —
And there the city lay before me,
With buildings gleaming in the sunlight
From where they stood on earth's strong pillars
To where they reached for God's firm fingers—
All seen from out a city window,
All seen beyond one square of window.

POWER

MARY MCDUGAL

"I am a great man!" cried the organizer of the Brick Layer's Union. "Cities rise at my word. Churches, schools and homes are paralyzed at my frown. If I cry 'STRIKE' my men drop their tools. If I say 'Back to your jobs!' back they go. They wait with hungry eyes for my lightest word. Glory! Glory! I am a King! I am full of POWER!" And he swelled out his chest until a button popped off.

Then the King of the country and the clever sweetheart of the Emperor just across the border, laughed until their laughter tinkled against the sky scrapers and the tall church spires.

"Ah, but I am a great man!" cried the King of the country. "My people Huzzah their throats raw when I pass through the streets. They pour out their blood fighting the things I cry to them as evil, and they defend with torn and writhing bodies the things I tell them are righteous. They are my clay!

Wandering Fires

How I can mould them! Glory! Glory! My very heart is beating POWER! I am divine!"

Then the President of the World League laughed until his sides could be heard cracking: laughed until his laughter rattled against the icy tops of the tallest mountains.

"I am the greatest man!" proclaimed the President of the World League. "All nations are below me — all are under my power. All peoples, all rulers, all kingdoms are under my feet. I breathe forth the very fire of POWER! I am a god!"

And Ghengis Khan, and John Bunny, and Charlemagne, and Rameses, and Julius Caesar, and Napoleon, and Ellen Terry, and Socrates, and Carrie Nation, and Alice and Phoebe Carey, and Beethoven, and Lucrezia Borgia, and John L. Sullivan laughed a shadowy laugh — a laugh that fluttered against the clouds above the earth.

"We were real gods!" they cried, "POWER ran in our veins!"

Then all the angels of the universe laughed — silvery laughter of scorn that lapped about the white mountains of the moon.

And the sun and moon flamed into laughter, and the Pleiades and the Twins and the Great Bear

Wandering Fires

flashed into laughter, laughter that rolled around the earth, blotting out its sky; that crashed from star to star, and sounded endlessly through echoing time.

But one sweet angel hid his head beneath God's footstool and wept in pity.

STEPHENS COLLEGE
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McDougal, Mary.

Wandering fires

